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SUBJECT: KOSOVO WEEKLY UPDATE: RHETORIC HARDENS AS A/S FRIED AND FM
KOUCHNER VISIT BELGRADE

11. SUMMARY: A/S Fried and the French Foreign Minister both came to Belgrade this week to offer an additional 120 days of engagement on Kosovo, but also to confirm to Belgrade that without an agreement of the parties, Kosovo will be independent. Both men expressed U.S. and French eagerness to help Serbia in the aftermath of a Kosovo decision. (A/S Fried's visit reported septel.) Both visitors received the same myopic response from Serbian leaders: Kosovo independence is unacceptable, illegal and will endanger Serbia continuing as a democratic state. Meanwhile, Serbian leaders categorically and preemptively rejected the latest UNSC draft resolution on the grounds that it proposes talks with a defined end and based on the Ahtisaari plan. The Kosovo Ministry is scrambling to corral the major political parties, including the Radicals, to agree on a renewed mandate for the GOS' Kosovo policy and participation in new talks on the basis of strict adherence to Serbia's "territorial integrity." END SUMMARY.

KOUCHNER VISITS BELGRADE

12. (SBU) French Foreign Minister Kouchner met in a two day visit to Belgrade with President Tadic, Prime Minister Kostunica, Foreign Minister Jeremic and Deputy Prime Minister Djelic. He also engaged with members of Serbia's intellectual elite and a group of young Serbians. The French Ambassador said that Kouchner delivered three clear messages: Serbia should accept the (about to be tabled) new UNSCR resolution allowing for a new period of negotiation; if at the end of that period, no agreement was reached, France will support implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan; and finally, France fully supported Serbia's EU future, but in order for Serbia to enter the Union, it must have resolved the Kosovo status question.

13. (SBU) The GOS reaction was as tiresome as it was predictable. Kostunica offered his standard legal argument to which Kouchner replied to Kostunica's chagrin that international law was not a static element, but had to evolve with realities on the ground. Tadic (supported by his foreign minister) argued his standard destabilization argument, along with his usual prediction of endangerment of Serbian democracy. To these concerns Kouchner responded that Kosovo settlement along Ahtisaari lines actually added, not detracted from stability and that France's position was based on friendship for Serbia -- an assertion that went over about as well as our own comments along exactly those lines.

14. (SBU) Kouchner's assessment of his conversations in Belgrade was that Tadic called anxiously for a Kosovo solution, but had nothing to offer. Neither did his Foreign Minister or Kostunica. Commenting on Belgrade's rejection of a new UNSCR, Kouchner sarcastically noted that Serbia had asked for new negotiations without preconditions. This resolution offered just that and now Belgrade wanted to add its own precondition that it would only

negotiate on explicit reference to UNSCR 1244. In Kouchner's working lunch with Jeremic and working dinner with Tadic, he probed the issue of partition and received a clear no. In his conversation with Belgrade's thinking elite, Kouchner received the strong message that Serbia needed the international community to decide Kosovo, since it was unable to do so.

15. (SBU) The French conclusion from the Kouchner visit is that Belgrade is continuing to make steps in the wrong direction. In an aside to the Ambassador, the French Ambassador relayed Kouchner's deep satisfaction over his strong relationship with Secretary Rice and France's determination to go forward with the U.S. if this final attempt fails.

GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY

16. (SBU) In a meeting with poloff on July 13, Kosovo Ministry State Secretary Dusan Prorokovic laid out the Ministry's next steps on

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Kosovo. He said the GOS' redlines on any new talks are that they must have "no timelines, no Ahtisaari and no Ahtisaari plan as its basis." Prorokovic assessed that there are "interesting proposals out there" including talks under the auspices of the Contact Group or a U.S.-EU-Russia joint framework. When reminded that the GOS had agreed to Ahtisaari's appointment in the first place, Prorokovic said Serbia had done so "to show it was willing to engage" in talks, but that it had become apparent that Ahtisaari "had his mind set" on independence during the talks. According to Prorokovic, the GOS does not wish to postpone talks but does want to delay a deadline for implementing a solution they don't want.

17. (SBU) The Ministry's main task at the moment is to work with all the major political parties to come to an agreement on a new negotiating platform to be discussed by parliament on July 24. On July 13, Prorokovic said they would be talking with the Radicals,

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who want the parliament to include stated consequences to a unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo, and GOS policy towards countries that recognize it. Prorokovic said that Minister Samardzic was trying to avoid such references as it limits GOS policy, and admitted that this was exactly what the Radicals are seeking to do. He also admitted, however, that there are no major Kosovo policy differences between the SRS and DSS.

18. (SBU) The Ministry's ultimate goal for the upcoming parliamentary session will be to re-approve the negotiating platform and renew the mandate for the GOS to participate in negotiations. The Kosovo Ministry, per the law on ministries passed in May 2007, would oversee the composition of the new negotiating team. Prorokovic assessed that it would still include the PM and President as the chief representatives, along with the Kosovo and Foreign Ministers. Referring to prominent Kosovo Serbs who were on the previous team as "party representatives from Kosovo," Prorokovic was not sure they would be included and that he preferred "experts" on issues such as Gordana Markovic and Aleksandra Fulgosi (both for cultural and religious protection issues), Dusko Celic (on decentralization) and agreed the Orthodox Church would be involved "primarily through Bishop Artemije."

OTHER DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

19. (SBU) UNMIK: Our Econ chief met on July 12 with Fayeze Risheg (protect throughout), UNMIK Pillar IV representative in Belgrade, to discuss the status of economic issues between Kosovo and Serbia. Risheg used the opportunity to spin his doomsday scenario for the coming months. He sees continuing EU reluctance to act without a Security Council resolution gradually dissolving as the current deadlock drags out over the next 12 months. The only realistic scenario then, in his view, would be a unilateral declaration of independence by Pristina, followed by rapid recognition by Quint,

and insertion of an EU mission on request of Pristina authorities. The Serbian reaction, he argued, would be hardline, a shutdown of the border and ejection of UNMIK police and customs by Serb enclave paramilitaries, in effect, eliminating the ABL, moving the boarder south to the Ibar, and establishing de facto partition. The Serbs would be happy to leave responsibility for the enclaves on the international community, he noted. Risheg, who meets with Belgrade officials on a regular basis, believes this is the Serbian Plan B.

¶10. (U) NATO: NATO Secretary General Scheffer arrived in Belgrade on July 13 for a one-day visit during which he will see the President, Prime Minister, Defense and Foreign Ministers and Chief of Defense Staff Ponos.

¶11. (U) Russia: Local press gave widespread coverage to comments this week by Russian FM Lavrov who renewed his call on July 13 for more Kosovo talks with "independent international mediators."

¶12. (U) UK: On July 10, a British parliamentary delegation visited the Serbian Parliament to acquaint itself with the relations between Belgrade and the EU and Serbia's Kosovo policy. They met with the Deputy Speaker Radoljko Obradovic, a delegation from the Serbian Parliament's foreign affairs and European integrations committees headed by MP Dragoljub Micunovic.

¶13. (U) EU: According to local media the EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn warned in Strasburg that postponement of defining Kosovo final status at the UN Security Council "would not lead anywhere".

¶14. (U) Slovenia: Local media reported Slovenian FM Rupel's July 12 comments in London that Slovenia supports the Ahtisaari plan as "the only sensible option" for a multi-ethnic Kosovo.

¶15. (SBU) COMMENT: Kostunica's strategy this week was clear -- reject any development from the USG, the Europeans, or the UN which did not meet his very specific demand: talks without Ahtisaari, without end, and with 1244 in place. Still, however, he seeks to assure the international community that Serbia is willing to engage constructively in a process to resolve Kosovo status. By leaping out in front of Russia to reject UNSC resolutions before they are submitted, and by spurning overtures of goodwill from senior representatives from the USG and France, Kostunica has shown again that he is not serious about engaging on Kosovo. Tadic and his team are equally unenthusiastic and in addition, unable, to carry a new Serbian position. END COMMENT.

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